

FITNESS

Get Into the Swim of Things

Are you ready to take the plunge and try a new fitness activity? How about water exercise? Also known as aquatics, water exercise is one of the best non-impact fitness activities around and just about anybody can participate. Pregnant women, the elderly or overweight, individuals with arthritis or those recovering from an injury can all benefit from the wide variety of aquatics classes currently available.

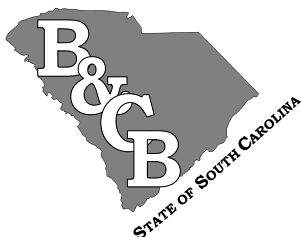
The buoyancy of water reduces the 'weight' of a person by about 90 percent. This means that the stress on weight-bearing joints, bones and muscles is similarly reduced. For this reason, it is unlikely that a water workout will result in injury or leave you with sore muscles. That's why the pool is such a great place for people with arthritis or back problems to exercise as well as for those who are new to exercise.

Aerobic workouts in the pool are perfect for those who find the same movements on land too jarring or painful: running, striding, kicking, leaping and even dancing. Also, if you are overweight or obese, water workouts are an ideal way to start an exercise routine because it does not place any stress on your joints and provide a great cardiovascular workout.

The resistance of water is perfect for a strength-training workout - instead of weights the water itself provides the resistance. One of the easiest ways to create resistance in the water is to cup your hands and push or pull the water away from you. Other devices, such as hand-held paddles and water chutes can increase the resistance to provide a more intense workout.

One of the greatest benefits of water exercise is its effect on flexibility. Water is a welcomed environment for performing stretches that might otherwise be difficult on land. Because the effects of gravity are lessened, you can move your joints through a wider range of motion and achieve long-term flexibility.

Once you've decided to take the plunge, it's simply a matter of finding the right class for you. Check with your health club or YMCA to see if they offer aquatics classes and drop in on one or two to see if they are right for your fitness level. A good class should include a good warm up, a period of cardiovascular and muscle conditioning that gradually increases and then decreases in intensity and a cool down. The cool down should include plenty of flexibility exercises for the entire body. Don't be afraid to ask about instructor qualifications and safety precautions. Your instructor should be certified and may also have special training in aquatic exercise.



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